No. 5.

THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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August—September, 1889.

QUESTION XII.

In 1888 *in "Lucifer" a contributor used "F. T. S. 2° " in signing an article. Can we have any information relative to the degrees in the Theosophical Society, if there are any?*

W. Q. J.—The article printed in *Lucifer* was not a contribution to that journal, but was a reprint of an article published in a Chicago journal, and hence the signature had to be copied. As yet there is no F. T. S. 2° who will thus sign, for the reason that that degree has not been given. The writer of the article referred to was no doubt deluded by one who, knowing that there had always been three lower degrees in the T. S., had pretended he could confer it. These 3 degrees were spoken of in the early years of the Society, and can be found mentioned in the earlier diplomas as having an existence. The higher degrees are held only by adepts and certain of their disciples. The whole Society in general is in the first (or rather 3d) or lowest degree, and it was very early found that as yet but few were competent to enter the next higher one, for that must be won and cannot be secured by either boasting, money, or favor. And some of the few who have entered the second are not aware of that fact, since they are made to pass through a time of probation which is long or short according to their own efforts *and* merits. And the efforts and merits of some years of probation may be reduced to a beginning *de novo* by a month of folly or of doubt. Were

the real leaders of the T. S. in want of mere followers by number instead of quality, They might long ago have taken in hundreds of anxious members. But They are not; and They can wait.

QUESTION XIII.

Does the cyclic law bring about its intended result without the conscious intervention of races and individuals? Or is it part of the working of that law that races and individuals shall consciously interfere in behalf of their own progress or retrogression?

If either or both, will not things be what they will be and should be, in spite of any or all of our efforts?

William Q. Judge.—The cyclic law has no "intended result", since it is a blind force. The cyclic law ruled in the days of the early races just as it now does, and before there were any races at all who could act consciously or unconsciously. The power of choice for the human race as a whole does not come until the turning point in evolution is reached—when *four* is turned into *five*—and, of course, until that time comes, "conscious intervention" by a race is impossible.

Individuals—meaning individual monads—may and do help on the progress of a race or a nation or oppose a contrary effect, but even that is under the cyclic law. In the *Occult World* by Mr. Sinnett, we have the words of a Master on this point, as follows, speaking of the Adepts:

"There never was a time within or before the so-called historical period when our predecessors were not moulding events and 'making history', the facts of which were subsequently and invariably distorted by historians to suit contemporary prejudices. . . . We never pretended to be able to draw nations in the mass to this or that crisis in spite of the general drift of the world's cosmic relations. *The cycles must run their rounds.* . . The major and minor yugas must be accomplished *according to the established order of things.* And we, borne along on the mighty tide, can only modify and direct some of its minor currents. . .

"Sometimes it has happened that no human power, not even the fury and force of the loftiest patriotism, has been able to *bend an iron destiny aside from its fixed course*, and nations have gone out like torches dropped into the water, in the engulfing blackness of ruin."

But this does not lead to negation or apathy. "Things will not be what they will be or should be, in spite of our efforts," but rather—"things will be as they should be, in spite of the apathy of those who see no use in action that is for the good of Humanity." Those who believe that the final good will in any case be accomplished are those who, sunk in the dark pit of selfish indifference, are forever an obstruction in the road of the aspiring souls who work for man's welfare.

In considering the subject we should not lose sight of the fact that other souls are reincarnating every day, bringing back with them the experience and Karma of distant past ages. That must show itself in them as they mature in this life, and they will furnish new impulses, new ideas, new inventions, new pieces of knowledge to the general sum, thus affecting the progress of the races, but all under cyclic law. And if we, by supinely sitting down, do not create for them, as they may have in the other days done for us, the right material, the right vehicle of civilization, the end of the cycle may be reached with *their* task unfinished—through our fault. The Karma of that will then be ours, and inexorable justice will bring us upon the scene in other cycles which eternally proceed out of the womb of time, to finish with heavy hearts the task we shirked. No theosophist, therefore, should ever begin to think that he need not offer any help because all will come right anyhow.

In our small way we should imitate the Great Brotherhood in its constant efforts to help Humanity. They know the cycles, and, using that knowledge, can see when the impulse of a new cycle is beginning. Taking advantage of this prescience, new ideas are projected among men and all good reforms are fostered. Why should we, merely because we are ignorant of the cycles, do nothing to help these great benefactors of the races? They offer to all men the truths of the Wisdom-Religion, making no selections but leaving results to the law. Is it for us to assume in our theosophical work that we, poor, weak, ignorant tyros, are able to select from the mass of our fellows the one or the many who may be fit to receive theosophy? Such a position of judge is vain, ridiculous, and untheosophic. Our plain duty is to present the truths of theosophy to all men, leaving it to them to accept or reject.

L. C. Q.—The fact that such great interest in theosophical ideas is now apparent, and that these doctrines are being given out, is proof to me that the cycle permits us mere ordinary mortals to lend our aid to those who are behind the scenes, for, were this a cycle when it would be unwise to give out such ideas, none of us would know anything about them. Should we not work heart and soul to spread before the world the philosophy we find so useful and comforting to ourselves?

B. D. S.—The doctrine of cycles ought not to be applied only to great questions of hundreds of thousands of years. If there be cycles, then they must obtain in the small things as well as the great. There must be cycles running up or down in every human being, in every nation, in every race, in every year as well as series of years. Is it not, as has been lately stated in the *Path*, the law of habit in combination with the laws governing statics and correlations in the moral and physical world? So it seems to me. And will it not be true also that the

major and minor cycles of the globe and the solar system are reflected in proportion in any human being we may select? For instance, to sleep means that a cycle has run down; to wake up means that another has already attained force. Yet we can alter by our own will the space over which this cycle acts, and hence can either aid or hinder the cyclic work; but in the end the great cycle of our life will embrace exactly the right quantities, because over that greater cycle we have but little control in our undeveloped state. And it seems to me that, as we deem it wise to aid our sleep through habit, we should not be averse from lending assistance to humanity in its struggle upward. To say that it will be all right, whatever we may do, is to assume that there is neither conscience nor truth in the Cosmos.

L. A. L.—The necessity for individual effort lies less in the need of the Right for assistance than in the need of the individual for development toward the Right. All are servants of the Law. Its course cannot be changed by the highest. But the lowest can elect whether he will make himself a good or a poor instrument for the Law. He will not be able to change the outcome of the final struggle, but he can affect its intensity and duration.

His choice, however, has a much greater influence on himself than on the cosmic scheme. In one sense, each one is the universal All, and therefore indifferent as well as earnest, black magicians as well as white Adepts, will share in the final triumph of the good side of the All. But in the meantime each monad works as an individual, and for a period which is in itself a short eternity he can choose for himself the divine content of doing what he recognizes to be right, or he can develop and strengthen those lower powers of his nature which must eventually be destroyed with pain before his true self can join in the victory of the True.

A recognition of the limitations of individual effort should check any tendency toward fanaticism. For the average man an even, harmonious development is wisest and most natural. By gradual steps the monad will be trained to make the final struggle without strain. The important thing is that all the preliminary training should have been in the right direction.

But our present concern is not with the end. To live up to, or at least toward, the highest that one can perceive at any given time, is his whole duty at that time. To do less will bring a present sense of failure which is at once a warning, a punishment, and an inspiration.

Ans.—We are not to conceive of Law as a thing distinct from the facts of which it is the generalized expression. Law is not an entity, or a self-operating force, or an intelligent being; it is a formulated statement of what investigation shows to be a uniform sequence in some

department of Nature. It is not the working of a force; it is the enunciation of how a force works.

Neither are we to conceive of it as an exterior potency, moulding the life and development of the region to which it applies itself: Rather is it the method interiorly of that life and development. It states how *in fact* certain consequences follow certain causes, and what *in fact* is the systematic evolution which pervades the region inspected, but it does not of itself effect those results,—"bring them about," as the question is worded.

The conception of Law is reached through a process of large induction from many and closely-observed phenomena. The area needs to be very broad, and, of course, the broader the area, the fuller its contents. Law is, one may say, the *essence* of them all, the common element which, disregarding irrelevant matters, pervades the whole. If the subject is simple and uncomplicated, the Law expressing it may be easily found and quickly grasped; but if that subject is in any way intricate, more particularly if it includes the excessively tangled operations of human will, taste, and passion, the Law is more elusive to the search and less susceptible of definition. Its formulation must be in very general terms, and its application must keep in view the myriad elements and forces working within its scope and affecting its precision.

Now the Cyclic Law is the generalized expression of a fact reached through an enormous induction from Nature. Its roots ramify through every department of being, for not only has it to do with Planetary Evolution and Terrestrial Change, but with anthropology in all its departments, with racial and national advance, with Nomology, Psychology, and Sociology, with the limitless differentiation of individual peculiarity, and—most of all—with the problem of free-will. To exclude any one of these would be to cut off one root of the Law. Moreover, each of these departments has its laws,—generalized expressions, in their respective regions, of how operate the forces throughout them.

Of all forces in the realm of being, those spiritual are the most elevated and rich. The impulses which incite man to aspire, to uplift himself to the Infinite, to embrace his brethren in his effort, are by far the purest and finest. They surpass in value, and, when genuine, in intensity, all such as are lower and carnal. A scheme of the Universe which omitted these would indeed be maimed. Hence, not merely because they exist, but because their quality is the loftiest, they are indispensable elements in the great realm of facts from which is drawn the Cyclic Law. A Cyclic Law which did not recognize the certainty of human aspiration and endeavor would be discredited from the outset.

While, then, we cannot correctly say that it is "part of the workings" of the Cyclic Law that "races and individuals shall consciously interfere in behalf of their own progress",—for, as we have seen, the law

is not a cause of any action, but only the statement of its mode, it is undoubtedly true that a certainty of such interference (or, rather, action) is one—a most important one—of the many facts out of which the Cyclic Law is induced.

And this gives clue to the solution of the second division of the problem. Things are to be, not irrespective of our efforts, but through them. It is not that Law and Fate are upon one side of a line, and Humanity, separated and distinct, upon the other side of it, Law and Fate carrying out a scheme without any reference to Humanity's participation. *Our actions are an integral part of the scheme.* It is true, indeed, that the ultimate triumph of Right is assured, and this because Good is inherently mightier than Evil; but it is equally true that that triumph may be hastened or retarded as its friends are reinforced or depleted. You and I cannot permanently enthrone Evil, but we may prolong its reign or shorten it. The Cyclic Law expresses the fact that *because* there are always many who are responsive to certain influences, good or bad, and *because* in both physical and moral worlds "conservation of energy" holds, and *because* there is a tendency in nature to periodicity and recurrence, that therefore there will be a repetition of certain phenomena at certain epochs. But it does not express any obligation that you or I shall belong to any particular group in morals, or that we need be zealous, slothful, or dormant.

Question XIII is one form of that very old problem—the coëxistence of destiny and free-will. It has been fought over and out by the ancient philosophers, the later schoolmen, and the modern theologians. No thinker can meet all its difficulties, which become thicker as we advance. All that can be done is to give their full force to such considerations as are adduced in the various replies, and to fall back on two great facts which are impregnable to all assault. One is the fact that certain features in the future of the universe are assured. This is beyond all doubt. The other is the fact that men are free to do as they choose. This, too, is beyond doubt. Precisely how the two facts are reconcilable may never be known, but our inability to harmonize the two does not affect the existence of either. Nothing can upset a *fact*. And if it be a law that general evolution is from lower to higher planes, and a further law that this evolution is so certain as to defy restraint, we are certainly wise to rank ourselves upon its side, and to coöperate with a force which we cannot break, but in opposing which we may ourselves be broken.

QUESTION XIV.

Is there not danger that Theosophy, by its doctrine of elementals, obsession, and the power over certain classes of "spooks" by mediums, may be reviving the superstitions of the Middle Ages and repeopling the air with the shapes of terror from which modern rationalism has cleared it? And if so, will there not be need of a Theosophic Reformation, even as there was in the 16th century of a Theological Reformation?

Ans.—These queries, subject to qualifications stated later, must be answered affirmatively. In the reaction now going on against the materialism of the century, there naturally occurs a tendency to welcome any belief which has the character of a protest, and so not a few ideas of past time have been revived and brought forward for a new career in Theosophic garb. The scientific negation of an unseen world incites to a contrary impletion of it with every form of life and degree of power. A Theosophist facing scientific incredulity is much like a Rationalist facing popular superstition,—he is apt to go to extremes.

Few loads lifted from humanity have been greater than that of Witchcraft, obsession, belief in succubi and incubi, and the whole mass of kindred superstitions which filled with gloom the intellectual and social life of the time, and kept men perpetually quaking before unseen dangers to body and soul. The terrorism exercised by the supposed presence and power of witches was something appalling, something so alien from modern thought that we can hardly picture it, can in no wise realize it. The paralysis it brought to reason, to rational belief, to spontaneous movement, to healthy endeavor, no words can over-paint. The life of the eras thus afflicted was one long night-mare. Only the utter overthrow of the whole diabolical conception released men from their slavery to imaginary terrors, cleared the air of demons and the earth of demoniacs, and restored sunshine and peace and freedom to humanity. It is remarkable, too, that this was brought about, not by labored arguments against the reality of the doctrines, but by the quiet growth of that spirit of unbelief which was the bane of the church and of superstition.

If the subjection of mankind to terrorism from an unseen world filled only with powers of darkness and malice was a measureless evil, deliverance from which is one of the triumphs of modern thought, one must look with just suspicion and alarm at any analogous conceptions which would involve analogous results. And it must be admitted that Theosophical literature does sometimes picture unseen forces as mainly malevolent and unseen regions as mainly dangerous. One is impressed at times with a fear that there is a lack of sunniness in the universe, that the evil powers are more diffused than the good, that there are more risks than encouragements on the Theosophic path, and that spiritual pitfalls are so numerous that hardly anybody passes safe. Moreover,

the very great potency conceded to elementals and obsessing spirits seems to impair the free action, and therefore the responsibility, of mortals, and thus, by lessening both justice and moral motive, to mar the perfection of the scheme. And this is especially the case where any real influence of mediums upon departed souls is asserted.

If a mediæval conception of life on earth and in the atmosphere surrounding it was to become prevalent among Theosophists, the fact might well excite the gravest regrets and the gravest forebodings. It would mean a mediæval stupefaction to intelligence and to endeavor,—and it would also mean a check to all spread of Theosophy among the broad-minded and the fresh-thoughted. Then, indeed, would there be need of just such a Reformation as that inquired of, a Reformation which would throw off chains and hurl away incubi, and demand light and air and freedom. And yet it is most improbable that such a conception will prevail and such a relief from it be needed. For this there are, among others, the following excellent reasons.

1st.—Theosophy not being a Creed, individual expositions of it are not authoritative, and cannot acquire anything analogous to ecclesiastical sanction. The suggestions of one thinker may be freely traversed by those of another, and so are no bar to entrance upon either the Theosophic domain or the Theosophic spirit. In other words, *Theosophy* is not committed to any view which Theosophists may express.

2d.—The best spirit of the age is hostile to any such tendency. In its higher form it has two aspects. The one is a desire for all truth, truth of the unseen as of the seen universe; the other is a fearless subjection of all theory to reason and the moral sense. This spirit divests itself of prepossessions and prejudice, throws open the windows to light from every quarter, and prepares a welcome for everything that can prove itself *genuine*. It is a spirit wholly out of touch with mediæval methods or aims or conceptions, and it will be most unlikely to adopt a view of life and its conditions which has anything in common therewith. Yet this is the spirit Theosophists covet, appeal to, find recruits among, look to as the source of their growing ranks.

3d.—The rational quality of a *moderate* statement of fact as to life in the unseen world will naturally ensure its triumph. The doctrine of varied forces distributed through Nature, and of varied beings exercising them, is so consonant with *a priori* considerations that one is impelled towards it. If one couples with it the sunny doctrines of absolute justice and of the larger preponderance of good—these also meeting with *a priori* support, there is no danger of any "repeopling of the air with the shapes of terror from which modern rationalism has cleared it". That rationalism will conserve the work it has effected.

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